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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this paper are (1) to describe background and current content of the Agenda for the United States Department of Education's assessment of the Chapter 2 block grant; (2) to stimulate discussion of the structure and approaches proposed; and (3) to solicit ideas and comments from state, local and university researchers. To meet these objectives, this paper is organized into background of the research and evaluation plan, the plan itself and a summary of purpose. The aspects of the development of the research and evaluation plan include the law and program structures, the organization of the work to develop and implement the plan in the Department of Education, and the body of advice and guidance received from outside the Department. The plan is included as Attachment 1. It divides issues into five categories, addressing implementation at three levels (Federal, State, local) and outcomes at two (accomplishment of general legislative goals and of specific State or local programmatic goals); lists when information will be available; shows sources of information in general terms; shows earlier ideas and changes; and emphasizes Department (or Federal) activities but shows applicability of other things under way as they become available. (PN)

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A RESEARCH AND EVALUATION PLAN FOR THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION BLOCK GRANT:

Background, Issues, Plans

Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the
American Educational Research Association

April 12, 1983

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1.0 Purpose of this paper

I have three purposes for this paper:

1. To describe background and current content of the agenda for the Department's assessment of the chapter 2 block grant;
2. To stimulate discussion of the structure and approaches proposed; and
3. To solicit ideas, comments from State, local and university researchers.

In order to meet those objectives, the paper is organized into three additional parts: background of the research and evaluation plan, the plan itself, and a summary.

2.0 Background of the Plan

In describing the background of our research and evaluation agenda for the Chapter 2 block grant, I will mention three aspects of its development: (1) the law and program structures themselves, (2) the organization of the work to develop and implement the plan in the Department of Education, and (3) the body of advice and guidance we have received from outside the Department.

2.1. The law and Chapter 2 block grant

Several education publications have carried articles about the block grant, and a recent book (Ellwood, ed., 1982) contains a full chapter on it, so I will not dwell too much on the details. I will, instead, highlight some relevant facts:

° The elementary and secondary education block grant is part of the larger Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act which established eight block grants across the government and set authorized spending levels for them for Fiscal Years 1982, 83, and 84.

° Those authorized levels are, for the most part, lower than appropriations for earlier antecedent programs.

° The block grant consolidated purposes of 42 antecedent education

programs into a single authorization in order to

1. assist States and districts to improve elementary and secondary education,

2. reduce administrative and paperwork burden, and

3. place the responsibility for design and implementation of school programs with local educators in consultation with parents and the local citizenry.

° The appropriations for Chapter 2 have been approximately $450 million for 1982 and 83, and a similar amount is requested for FY 84.

° The first grants were awarded to States in late fiscal year 82 (last summer) for distribution to districts for schoolyear 1982-83.

° That distribution to districts occurs through a formula -- to distribute no less than 80% of the funds -- as well as through competitions established in some States for allocating part of the remaining 20%.

° The formula and general State priorities for the funds are part of the agenda of a governor-appointed State advisory panel.

° Those priorities must fall into one or more of three general areas of basic skills development, educational improvement and support, and special projects.

° The formula is developed by State officials and approved by the Secretary of Education to allocate funds based on enrollment and "high cost" factors such as children from low-income families, in economically depressed areas, or in sparsely populated areas.

° Private school students must be provided for equitably.

° Locals and States must evaluate their efforts beginning in FY 1984.

2.2. <u>The organization of staff in the Department to assess the block grant</u>

As is the case for all Federally funded activities, there are units in the Department responsible specifically for administering the block grant (for example, the "program office" is responsible for approving

State applications, drafting regulations and nonbinding guidance), overseeing its operations in concert with other Federal efforts (the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education), establishing its budget, coordinating efforts across the Department and across agencies that affect it (the Deputy Under Secretary for Interagency and Intergovernmental Affairs), conducting research (NIE), and describing and assessing its operations (Planning and Evaluation Service). Representatives of all these units formed a work group 18 months ago to keep track of activities across the Department relating to the block grant, to design a plan for systematically describing and assessing the implementation of Chapter 2, and to inform each other of the results of elements of the plan as they were implemented. And, of course, one goal of staff at this level keeping themselves informed is to be able then to brief supervisors who are usually policy officials. Federal staff from outside the Department from OMB and occasionally GAO also attend the meetings, as do staff from the Council of Chief State School Officers and, at times members of special interest groups.

The advantages of such a mechanism for sharing ideas and information are fairly obvious on a day-to-day basis: staff know people to call for answers to questions, they have access to materials distributed by other offices, etc. Longer-range advantages take more time, of course, to identify, but one that seems apparent already is the capability of developing a research and evaluation plan for the Department that effectively synthesizes information about both issues of importance to different functional organizations and data-gathering strategies. In the latter case, for example, we are able to define explicitly how information in the program

office (applications, accumulated correspondence) will be used to address various topics. This allows better focusing, and thereby better efficiency, in the use of the Department's research and evaluation funds for extramural research.

This gives a sense of how the plan was affected by concerns and activities of staff from offices across the Department. It was also affected, of course, by guidance to the Department from Congress, GAO, and OMB. That body of guidance is described briefly below.

2.3. Guidance from Congress, GAO, and OMB

The block grant is a new way for distributing Federal funds and prompts, accordingly, new discussions about the need and role of information. These new discussions occur, however, in the context of traditional debates that weigh, for example, the need for data for Federal accountability against the costs of obtaining them. (Examples abound of evidence about this struggle. Note the tension even in legislation between mandates for new studies versus those for paperwork and burden control mechanisms.)

The new considerations dwell, however, on unintended effects of data; that is, don't we, by collecting data on certain dimensions, show the importance of those dimensions, and couldn't this influence what States and locals do? The reactivity of social science measures ("the process of measuring may change that which is being measured," Campbell and Stanley, 1966, page 9) surely is not a new worry. What may be new is the raising of the concern to one higher level of abstraction (moving from a concern that a pretest may, for example, sensitize a student to what's relevant and affect his retention of course matter following the pretest -- thereby not making the results of the study generalizable to cases when the course is offered without a pretest -- to a concern that decision-

makers will perceive rightness or value in certain ways of proceeding with the block grant because Federal data collections request data along certain dimensions).

These concerns are important. State and local officials must realize that they are in charge of how the block grant funds are used across a broad range of authorized priorities. Federal data collectors must not allow their work to give any message that might contradict that fact. Federal officials also recognize, however, that collecting no data also gives a message (of lack of importance compared to programs we can describe, of lack of proper stewardship over taxpayers' monies, etc.).

With that background, and recognizing that different agencies in this conversation have different roles and, understandably, different senses of risks about veering off the fine line that represents a good balance of data for accountability without attributing particular values to the findings, I've listed below the guidance to the Department about assessing/describing the block grant.

° Congressional hearings, July 1981 (paraphased): "Mr. Secretary, will you be able to evaluate the effects of this new block grant?"

"Yes, Sir, we will."

° General guidance on evaluation to all agencies administering block grants, OMB, October, 1981:

> "The following are the goals for the block grants program, expressed in terms of operable questions against which activities carried out under the block grants should be evaluated. They are grouped into three categories: adherence to constitutional principles, States exercising maximum discretion, and minimum federal intrusion" (page 2).

° Allowance letter for FY 83 expenditures and polices: OMB to the Department of Education, January 1982:

"Resources...are provided to evaluate the operation of (the) block grant. Advance planning for the conduct of this evaluation is essential to establish clear objectives and timetables, minimize burdens on the States, and assure high quality analysis to aid decision-making."

° GAO report, September, 1982:

"Monitoring the expenditure of block grant funds to achieve stated national objectives--a theme throughout this report--has been and is a central Federal accountability function under past and present block grant legislation" (page v).

° Questions from appropriations committees about FY 83 continuing resolution, November, 1982:

"What are the Department's plans for evaluating the impact of Chapter 2 on participating students, teachers, etc.?"

"What do you know now and will you know in the future about the number and kinds of students served in Chapter 2 programs?"

° Senate appropriations committee report, December, 1982:

"The allowance would provide for evaluation studies of the block grant for improving educational programs. This is the first block grant program in education, and the Committee believes that thorough analysis of its operations and effectiveness should be undertaken."

° Allowance letter for FY 84 expenditures and policies: OMB to the Department of Education, February 15, 1983:

"This year, the Department will be initiating evaluation studies of the implementation and impact of the Chapter 2 block grant. We wish to emphasize the importance this evaluation effort holds for future policy and planning for education programs. Funds for this purpose are specifically earmarked in 1983 and 1984."

° Forms clearance denial from paperwork staff at OMB and the Department, March, 1983:

"The central analysis question for ECIA is how block grants affect spending decisions of State and local agencies."

Let me emphasize again that although contradictory, each of the above statements is right. There are needs for each of the concerns noted above. They form the fabric that we hope will keep our work on that fine line of balance between accountability and flexibility. The purpose of this portrayal is to sensitize researchers to the need to appreciate the deliberations underway and to develop, out of that appreciation, methodology to handle the competing concerns.

3.0. The Plan

Attachment 1 is our current plan. Several aspects of it should be noted:

° It divides issues we anticipate to be important into five categories: addressing implementation at three levels (Federal, State, local) and outcomes at two (accomplishment of general legislative goals and of specific State or local programmatic goals).

° It portrays when information will be available in three points in time relevant to our officials: spring 1983 because of appropriations and oversight testimony, and two later more general designations. Our intentions are to update these time designations so that more detail is offered for the later years as we move closer to them.

° It shows sources of information in general terms which are, briefly:

Analysis Center - an effort under contract to OPBE to perform "quick turn-around analyses";

Case studies - a set of research studies under contract to NIE, with OPBE joint monitoring;

In-house - analyses done by Department staff using available data;

National study - a new effort to begin next summer and describe implementation in local districts nationwide;

Baseline Data - the body of knowledge from studies of antecedent programs and of combinations of Federal and State programs describing activities in States and districts before the block grant;

Small Study - an earlier planned effort, now cancelled due to the discovery that GAO planned to cover the same topics;

GAO - a study of the implementation of the block grant in 13 States examining, in education, the impact of the block on services to students, compliance with the law, management, and the availability of information to decision-makers at the State level.

NCCE - the National Committee on Citizens in Education is conducting surveys among its members as well an analyzing State application data;

FRS - "Fast Response Survey", an NCES mechansim that collects data through a one-page questionnaire to a representative sample of districts nationwide, an effort planned for spring 1983 but cancelled due to clearance problems and the discovery that the American Association of School Administrators was covering some of the same topics in a survey. Depending on reactions of our officials to the timing of data from our national survey, we may try to rely on a Fast Response Survey to describe FY 84 district operations.

° The plan shows earlier ideas and changes (the bracketed entries and replacements).

° It emphasizes Departmental (or other Federal) activities but will show applicability of other things underway as they become available (much as the AASA is shown now).

4.0. Summary

The purpose of this has been to share some of our concerns and plans in the Department of Education and solicit some of your reactions. We have focused on a plan--its elements and implementation; but more importantly for the effectiveness of the various efforts to assess the block grant, we have discussed a bit of the healthy tension between needs for data and concerns about possible reactivity of the data collection processes. We encourage lots of discussion and debate about these topics and hope to learn by participating in those activities ourselves.

References

Campbell, Donald T. and Stanley, Julian C., Experimental and Quasi-experimental Designs for Research, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966.

Ellwood, John W. (ed.), Reductions in U.S. Domestic Spending, How They Affect State and Local Government, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1982.

U.S. General Accounting Office, Lessons Learned from Past Block Grants: Implications for the Future, Washington, IPE-82-8, September 23, 1982.

ATTACHMENT 1

ECIA CHAPTER 2 -- ISSUES, INFORMATION SOURCES, AND TIMING

	INFORMATION AVAILABLE		
	SPRING 1983	FY 1983	FY 1984
I. Are the legislated goals of the block grant being accomplished?			
A. How has administrative burden for SEAs/LEAs been affected?	Analysis Centers, Case Studies	Nat'l Study	
B. How have SEA and LEA responsibilities and flexibility regarding program design and implementation been affected?	Case Studies	"	"
C. Have regulatory requirements been decreased? How has educational efficiency been affected as a result?	Analysis Center	"	"
II. How has the block grant been implemented at the State level? Which groups or levels of SEA staff have contributed to the decision-making process at the SEA level? How have SEAs determined policies regarding the block grant?			
A. How were State policies and priorities regarding the distribution and uses of block grant funds set, particularly with regard to:			
1. Development of the State allocation formula and the identification of "high cost" children	In-house, NCCE, Case Studies	Nat'l Study	
2. Use of the State 20% set-aside	In-house	"	"
3. The provision of services to private school children	Case Studies, FRS	"	"

	INFORMATION AVAILABLE		
	SPRING 1983	FY 1983	FY 1984
B. What role did the SEAs play in implementing Chapter 2, and what procedures have they developed, particularly in the following areas:			
1. rulemaking 2. monitoring 3. auditing 4. technical assistance 5. evaluation 6. coordination with other programs	All from Case Studies and Baseline Data		Nat'l Study
C. What role did the following groups, other than the SEA, play in developing State policies:			
1. Governor-appointed advisory council 2. State legislature 3. Governor's office 4. State Board of Education 5. Other special interest groups or ad hoc advisory groups 6. LEAs	Case Studies for all Topics, NCCE		Nat'l Study
D. How do State demographic, economic and educational factors influence how the block grant is used and administered?			
1. Were the funds distributed with school finance/equalization procedures?	Case Studies		Nat'l Study
2. How does the size of the grant affect State staff attention to it?	"	"	" "
E. How have State programs changed to reflect Chapter 2 concerns?	"	"	" "
F. How have State agencies been reorganized as a result of Chapter 2?	"	"	" "
G. What do State educators and officials suggest as strengths, weaknesses, and needed changes in Chapter 2?	"	"	" "

	INFORMATION AVAILABLE		
	SPRING 1983	FY 1983	FY 1984
III. What activities has the Department of Education (ED) undertaken to implement the block grant?			
A. How has policy been set at the Federal level? How are ED's processes similar to or different from those in other agencies?	In-house	[Small Study] GAO	
B. How has ED interpreted the provisions of Chapter 2 and communicated these interpretations to State and local grantees?			
1. Regulations	In-house		
2. Non-regulatory guidance	"	"	
C. What types of policy clarifications or guidance have State and local grantees or administrators sought from ED? Do State and local grantees feel that ED has been responsive to their needs? In what ways has ED supported or failed to support State and local requests?		[Small Study] GAO	
D. What do State and local educators cite as successful in ED's administration of Chapter 2? What do they cite as unsuccessful? What changes do they suggest?	Case Studies		Nat'l Study

	INFORMATION AVAILABLE		
	SPRING 1983	FY 1983	FY 1984
IV. What do local school districts do with their block grants?			
A. How do districts decide on the uses of the funds? What groups are consulted?		Case Studies	Nat'l Study
B. What kinds of programs are supported with Chapter 2 funds?		[FRS]	
Are Chapter 2 programs coordinated with district programs?		AASA, Case Studies	Nat'l Study
1. Programs for basic skills development			
2. Programs for educational improvement and support			
3. Special projects			
C. Which populations are served with Chapter 2 funds?			
1. What school sites, grades, groups of children receive services from Chapter 2 funds?			Nat'l Study
2. What strategies are devised to ensure that equitable services are provided to private school students? Are these strategies well-implemented? How do districts carry out reasonable consultations with private school officials?		[FRS] AASA, Case Studies	Nat'l Study
D. What do local educators and officials suggest as Chapter 2's strengths, weaknesses, needed changes?		Case Studies	Nat'l Study

	INFORMATION AVAILABLE		
	SPRING 1983	FY 1983	FY 1984
V. What are the effects of Chapter 2?			
A. Compared to legislated goals (part I above)	Case Studies, Anal. Center		Nat'l Study
B. With regard to the distribution of resources			
1. What is the relationship between district characteristics and amount of funding received?			
- Are there districts that choose not to receive Chapter 2 funds, and if so why?	[FRS], Case Studies		
- What types of districts will receive more funds, or will receive Federal funds for the first time?	"	"	"
- What types of districts will receive substantially less funding under Chapter 2 than they did under the antecedent programs?	"	"	"
2. How do overall funding levels at the Federal level affect the purposes for which Chapter 2 funds are used in affect school districts?			
- How are priorities set?	Case Studies		Nat'l Study
- Are funds focused on obtaining goals that are of high local priority? What are these goals?	"	"	
- How are such needs assessments conducted?	"	"	

	INFORMATION AVAILABLE		
	SPRING 1983	FY 1983	FY 1984
C. With regard to State and local decision-making			
1. Who influences what gets done with the block grant money?	Case Studies		Nat'l Study
2. How are State and local goals defined and met with the block grant?	"	"	" "
D. With regard to school outcomes, as appropriate per site			
1. For those sites emphasizing school quality, what are they doing and to what avail?			Nat'l Study
2. For those focusing on student skills, what strategies are they using and how effectively?			" "
3. In sites trying with their block grant funds to improve staff skills or attitudes, what are the activities being tried and toward what result?			"